

Mark Philp's notes on the form of knowledge in social work revisited

In social work literature some papers might matter more than others. We assume this might be the case with 'Notes on the form of knowledge in Social Work', written by Mark Philp. Even though it was written in 1979, this paper recurrently keeps appearing on and off through writings and footnotes of many scholars in social work and beyond. In brief, Philp might have been pioneering discours analysis on social work literature and practices and suggests there is an underlying constitution of everything that is said and done in social work. This constitution he argues, creates knowledge in social work but also limits social worker to this very knowledge. His analysis draws on Marxist, Foucauldian theories and is utterly 'historical' as social work knowledge "is created by historically located shifts in discursive relations" (Philp, 1979: 103). However, there might be more continuity, as he positions social work historically as mediator between objectified individuals and subjectivity. A stance, which we assume, might still be acknowledged in social work today. In this respect we wondered how scholars in social work today would read and comprehend this seminal paper. What aspects of Philps' hypothesis, analysis and arguments would they find relevant for social work analysis today and why? In what way might his 'notes' enable us to challenge social works knowledge base and positioning? Our analysis is based on two distinct research methods. Firstly, we read through some of his references in order to get more familiar with his thoughts, sources and time. Secondly, we held two discussion panels: one in Antwerp (B) and one held in Ghent (B). Participants, 16 in sum, were selected based on their contribution to social work practice, social work education or research. They have scholarly backgrounds in social work, philosophy, criminology, history, pedagogy and psychology. In our presentation and drawing on Philps' analysis and the comments of Belgian scholars, we will focus on the question if social work should preferably should be seen as a mediator. Or is this positioning no longer relevant or tenable in social work today as society since 1979 has changed dramatically.

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References

Philp, M. (1979). Notes on the Form of Knowledge in Social Work. *Sociological Review*, 1, 83-111.